

May 10, 2006

Members of the Michigan House Judiciary Committee:

As a coalition of organizations focused on promoting and protecting access to the full range of reproductive health care, the American Civil Liberties Union of Michigan, MARAL Pro-Choice Michigan, and Planned Parenthood Advocates of Michigan are concerned about the potential impact of House Bill 5879, House Bill 5880, House Bill 5881, House Bill 5882 and House Bill 5883.

We believe women should **NOT** be coerced into or out of having an abortion. All reproductive health choices should be freely made and well informed. Michigan's existing informed consent law already mandates that a woman's consent to an abortion must be "given freely and without coercion."

One potential problem with this package of bills would be mandating the role a doctor would play in a woman's decision-making process. Doctors would be required to act as police investigators and lawyers instead of focusing on providing women's health care.

In House Bill 5880, it is mandated that doctors provide woman information about contacting local law enforcement and domestic violence shelters. With eighty-three counties lacking abortion providers, many women travel a substantial distance to obtain these medical services. Are doctors required to provide women with this information in the woman's local area? Is this information available to all doctors throughout the state? Will the State be compiling this information and distributing it to all medical facilities and practitioners? While we believe the State of Michigan should provide up-to-date information of this nature to all doctors and medical facilities throughout the state, regardless of the facilities services or scope of practice, we want the Legislature to provide clarity to this issue to ensure the burden is not placed on individual doctors to research and compile this information.

Additionally, we feel it is important to remove requirements related to doctors under these bills, instead ensuring that legal culpability is placed where it should be, on those who may actually coerce a woman, not on a doctor who has no reasonable way of knowing of the coercion.

If it is the goal of the Michigan Legislature to reduce the number of abortions in Michigan, preventing unintended pregnancies should be their top priority. We should be working together to move forward commonsense policies that would improve access for low-income women to reproductive and prenatal health care, expand insurance coverage of contraceptives, and provide abstinence-plus education to our young people. By focusing on preventing unintended pregnancies, we would reduce the need for elective abortions in Michigan and accomplish everyone's goals. If the Legislature truly cares for the women of Michigan, the time has come to work together to find common ground solutions and prevent women from being faced with an unintended pregnancy.

Sincerely,

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